

January 2015

A Dialogue with Salah Eddin al Jourshi*

ARI Dialogues

ARI Dialogues provide the opportunity for leading figures and active members in their societies to discuss their democratic visions, the core challenges, and potential routes for political change towards democracy in times of transition.

Salah Eddin al Jourshi

Researcher and journalist, President of the Al Jaheth Cultural Forum, Tunisia.

Bassma Kodmani

Mr. Salah al Jourshi, we would like to hear your ideas and your interpretation of the historic steps that people have taken in the Arab region. It seems that in Tunisia you have already started to draft a roadmap for your future strategy. We'd like to try and understand the secret of your success. You overcame an impasse in 2013 by reaching a political consensus between leaders. This opened the door for a new constitution and a new course of action. Everyone in the region wants to understand the process. Was it down to regional conditions? Was it the result of Tunisia's internal situation or its political and cultural history? Or was specific individuals who helped bring it about?

Salah al Jourshi

Let me start by saying that I am pleased to be having this discussion with you. I feel good at being in Tunisia right now, as it emerged from a turbulent time, because revolutions are painful and people swing between despair and hope within short periods of time. A change in the ruling system creates turmoil and confusion about the country's direction, the leadership, and the relationships between parties as splits occur within old systems. This is why you see the public and the ruling parties moving rapidly from a state of despair to one of enthusiasm: a reaction being part of the Tunisian revolution since the outset.

In fact, the major crisis that we underwent in the summer of 2013 was not the only crisis. There were previous ones and you used to hear despairing comments from time to time and doubts rose about the success of the experience and talk about a

* Dialogue conducted by Bassma Kodmani, Executive Director of ARI, and Salam Kawabiki, Deputy Director, in Tunis on May 9, 2014.

possible deadlock and the window of opportunity closing. Yet shortly after that, people returned to talking about the revolution and its goals, about Tunisia and about the future, just as if you were watching a movie that plays on emotions and feelings. I believe that many factors have contributed and made Tunisia capable of overcoming obstacles, even if on a temporary basis. I can recall that Tunisia has not been a country of revolutions. Revolutions in the history of Tunisia have been exceptional and very rare, especially if we go back about two and half centuries. What has been consolidated in the political and social culture of Tunisians is a kind of reformist and reconciliatory trend or approach that fears descent into war or all-out confrontations. This means in reality that efforts are made to find a solution, even if it is incomplete. So, the history of political culture and political experience in Tunisia is a history of negotiations and compromise and a history of achieving a solution even at the expense of the interest of different parties. This has been seen over and over again after the revolution.

Bassma Kodmani

What do you think are the main influencing factors in the region, or from abroad, the specific constituents of Tunisian society and leaders- that helped Tunisia to emerge from the crisis?

Salah al Jourshi

There are several factors, but I want to give priority to the historical and cultural depth of the unique Tunisian experience. Of course, other factors contributed, some of them the result of the political elites in Tunisia. At least some of the elite want to play a revolutionary role and raise their voice, protest, take to the streets and accuse adversaries of opportunism and of working against the revolution. They talk about decisive action, but if we look closely at the political conduct of the Tunisian elite, we discover that they do not go far in the discussion of boycotting others and the revolution, because theirs is the culture of compromise. This may apply to the liberals who by their very nature have no desire to be excluded historically, but it definitely applies to the leftists, including those on the far left who were forced by the special situation in Tunisia to integrate gradually with the process. The same applies to the Islamists, who have become heroes and are experienced in tactical manoeuvres and so-called political moderation. So an important element in understanding what happened is the nature of the Tunisian elite.

The third factor is very important because, when you talk about history, you need to talk about geography. Tunisia is a country with a coastline and historically many people have tried to

invade and settle in Tunisia. Therefore, Tunisian relationships with others go back a long way. This has resulted, to a large extent, in Tunisia being governed by both regional and international strategic factors. No one in Tunisia could imagine acting on their own. We might attack imperialism, colonialism and foreign powers verbally, but deep inside we accept and take into consideration the fact that we are surrounded on all four sides. So, I believe that the geographical location of Tunisia has helped Tunisians limit their inflammatory radical discourse and transform into an open society. It is a society affected by the ethics of businessmen and they are not revolutionary. The businessman does not cut ties. He wants people to buy his products, to make deals with them and will even give up some of his profit to sustain trading. We are a society that has the phlegmatic farmer with the trader concerned about deals and success. So, geography has played an important role, and I might add another important element, which is the lack of resources. Had we alternative financial and physical resources, our conduct may have been different. But when a person realises that his financial resources are limited, he has to live with what he has so that he does not spend more than he can afford. This has made Tunisians succeed in their calculations. They do not take risks but at the same time, they are ready to invest their symbolic capital. Bourguiba used to address the Tunisian people and say “We have no oil or other sources of wealth; we have something called “al-shakhma”. He meant the brain, thoughts and the wisdom of history. This is something to invest in and it played a role in what we achieved.

Bassma Kodmani

When you talk about the components of Tunisian society, are we talking about civil society or political parties?

Salam Kawakibi

Are parties built on modern concepts, like the modern parties in advanced countries, or are they gatherings linked to personal connections, family relations or interests and limited to a specific time - rather than based on ideology?

Salah al Jourshi

My viewpoint is one that many people may agree with. I believe that one of the outcomes of the Tunisian experience is that we do not have real parties. The partisan experience in Tunisia is still under construction and the culture of the party in its modern structure is still less than satisfactory. The sole party that succeeded, to a certain extent, is the Constitutional Party {of both Bourguiba and Ben Ali} because of its history and because it succeeded during the national movement in expanding and gaining the support of most sectors. This gave the party power and representation to negotiate with France. Later, the party

remained strong, but it merged into the state and its main focus was on the state. This gradually weakened it until it became a burden on the homeland and the Tunisian public. The Communist Party was established at an early stage, but could not expand or become a real power for two reasons. Firstly the ideology of the party, which did not sit well with the cultural fabric of the society; and secondly the Communist Party, like all communist parties in Arab countries, is linked to the Soviet Union and its policies conflicted with national interests on many occasions.

The opposition and parties that wanted to establish themselves remained weak and incapable of becoming an organised influential power. Parties in Tunisia grew weak, including the Ennahda Movement, which was established but was not deeply entrenched in the organisational structure of society and remained an idea launched for different society or country. At an organisational and structural level, the movement remained loyal to the values of the Muslim Brotherhood in its traditional, ideological and religious sense and did not change into a political party until the present time. When you examine what is happening inside the Ennahda Movement, you feel this contradiction and polarisation between the traditions of the religious groups. Between the Sufi movement and organised loyalty to al-Sheikh, and the apparent trend among professionals in the Ennahda Movement who incline towards the idea of a modern party based on institutions and legitimised relationships. The flimsy party philosophy within the Ennahda Movement can explain a lot about its weaknesses and mismanagement when it assumed power and ran public affairs. This can apply to the rest of the proposed parties that we cannot yet judge. We have to give them some space and time because the authoritarian regime which arose during the reign of Bourguiba, and which developed in a dreadful way during the period of Ben Ali, did not allow these parties to grow under normal conditions nor to make use of conflict and the process of expansion and construction. The revolution gave political parties the opportunity to become real, which is what they are now in doing and we see the constitution as a first step in this process.

Bassma Kodmani

We face two trends in the Arab world with different perspectives of the values upon which society must be established. There are core disagreements over values, the meaning of freedom and equality, the issue of legitimacy and sound governance, and the relationship of religion with the state and the identity of the citizen. All these are core issues to be

addressed by the Tunisian experience, and maybe in some other Arab countries, such as Morocco, and of course we look to the Egyptian model, which is still not successful. It seems impossible to reach an agreement on the core issues, leading to polarisation and sometimes confrontation, including violent confrontation. Would you agree with this? How can we deal with these issues? Can we deal with them in daily life through a pragmatic approach? And can we solve economic and political issues on a daily basis? Or should we question all the issues and values, agree to them in a historical and definitive manner, and then move to the question of implementation? Maybe this happened in other societies when there was a communist and a liberal vision. Western countries dealt with these issues and reached historical compromises in some countries. But today we face the huge challenge with the whole world watching. In the Arab world there is a liberal wing with its own vision of society and democratic values and there is another wing with a different set of values. Can these two visions be reconciled? I believe that this has to be done now and we need to build on this experience.

Salah al Jourshi

Revolutions are a kind of dream, and the dream is to offer the sky to a person who is in a state of inertia and compliance but imagines himself flying, or in a different set of circumstances, or having special powers that are not part of real life. The dream opens doors and I believe that ideals are important in the process of major change that affects individuals or societies. We cannot live without ideals. If you go to the revolutionaries and fighters in Syria, how can you convince them to oppose the burning of oil barrels and the tanks of the powerful regime that uses violent policies against them? You cannot obtain a minimum level of patience unless there are ideals, which make people view themselves differently. With ideals, people look in the mirror and do not just see a head, legs and arms; they can see themselves as cowards, or as a power that can oppose the most ferocious regime. Having ideals are a basic element in the process of transformation in individuals and populations. This is why there is an essential phase in the process of change which is to refresh and nurture the major concepts of freedom, equality and justice in human history. Even if my ideals falter at some point, they can be strongly revived in my son and grandson. I may fail to translate these values into real action, but belief keeps them. The problem here is how to transform these into plans and content for life. Mechanisms must be identified to move from one state to another. Thus, we must liberate the values from closed and stagnant ideologies because ideology is a

basic element in the building of the intellectual process. The ideological dimension may develop and conserve values and constrict them within a narrow frame. It may even transform them into a tool of sabotage or self-destruction if the ideology veers from its natural course to become a restricted, oppressive project. A human being may become a revolutionary, an instigator or an aggressor, especially if he has the weapons and the means to wipe out others. We need to link values with a series of mechanisms or controls. An ideal that becomes detached from reality loses its importance; in fact, it may push people to suicide. An ideal that does not connect with the real problems of people becomes a missile. One that is used for individual, personal and sectarian interests loses its value. What I mean is that we must cling to higher values while still keeping our feet on the ground and our eyes open, so that we understand how to permeate society and reach the core issues to re-draft them in the context of a clear framework of programmes.

Bassma Kodmani

This happened in the Tunisian constitution; that is why I asked about reconciliation between these values.

Salah al Jourshi

So when we talk about reconciliation between values, there must be a link with reality to make a decision. There must be an agreement between the various conflicting parties to sit down and define the goal of finding a way to organise social life and live together through consensus. The culture of consensus is essential to transform values into programmes that can lead to the achievement of common interests. Pragmatism is sometimes necessary to solve problems, but should not be the way because we do not want to reach a point where we compromise ourselves. It is a type of dialectical relationship. This is what happened in the Tunisian experience when everyone was cornered inside a hall. This hall is called the Constituent National Assembly and everyone was told that Tunisia cannot take too much conflict, accusations and counter-accusations, that the economy was collapsing and groups acting against the revolution could drain the revolution. So, you have to agree, to fight and disagree, but, ultimately, you have to reach an agreement.

Salam Kawakibi

When you say that they were cornered in a hall and were told that Tunisia is in danger, do you mean that it was the community? National pressures? Or were there regional, external and international factors that forced them to take matters seriously and move from accusations and counter-accusations to prolonged discussions to reach a consensus?

Various factors played a role and led to this consensus. First, we said earlier that there was historical readiness to reach a consensus; this is important because it is not found in other societies. When the Algerians disagreed on how to rule, they fought each other and killed important leading figures in the history of the Algerian national movement. So, we have consensus. Also the regional and international role was decisive because revolutions cannot last long if they are not supported by regional parties. If you have a revolution in a country and there is no space for your revolution to roll out, you may find yourself under siege or you may need to change your tactics. At times, following the revolutions in Libya, Egypt, Yemen and Syria, the Tunisians thought there was a historical inevitability. This made some political leaders and factions fantasise about some kind of historical tide or wave and they started looking for projects outside the country. We are talking here about the Caliphate...etc., and so the dream started. But when other parties and revolutions faced crises, the Tunisians found that they remained the last fortress and that their responsibility was doubled in the sense that they needed to save the country from the possibility of going the same way as Libya and Egypt. They started to feel that it was their duty to restore hope to these revolutions. I sensed that feeling in several political leaders and this pushed them to accept concessions and reach consensus. This is the second element.

The third element that played an important role was the need to give up the idea of allowing the majority to decide issues. It has been proven and experience has shown that the logic of a majority doesn't work in running public affairs, especially during a transitional phase. Transitional phases are fragile and complicated and a mindset of consensus is required more than being decisive or reflecting the majority's opinions. At the beginning, some parties were convinced, especially the Ennahda Movement, that "we had won the elections and must lead the country alone, and if you have an opinion, go ahead and present it". When disagreements with the opposition became serious, they described the opposition as of zero importance, which underestimated the need for others in the building process. It also implied self-aggrandisement and dependency solely on one's own capabilities. Events revealed that this was a historical fallacy because transitional phases, especially in countries wanting to move from a state of oppression to democracy, require the efforts of all men and women, and all factions and social forces, to form a historical consensus. This helped us

greatly in avoiding a crisis that would have divided us, as we were on the verge of violent confrontations between people. So, if you want to assume control of a transitional phase, you must invite help from others without exception, even if you are older or your group is larger.

Bassma Kodmani

How do you assess the extent of political awareness and pluralistic democratic culture in Tunisian society? We say that the Arab people do not possess this culture and still need years to achieve it. We heard yesterday that one of the candidates in the Egyptian presidential elections said that Egypt and the Egyptian people still need 25 years to achieve a culture of democracy and a democratic state. This is not at all encouraging because the Egyptian people took to the streets and acted in a responsible manner. We have great confidence and hope in people because we know that political regimes are on their way out if they conduct real core changes. This requires a certain level of awareness and political culture by people. Can we say that the Tunisian people have it? Is it based on the fact that there is a middle class? Does civil society support the characteristics of the people? You mentioned the political parties and described them as weak and fragile, including the Islamic wing or Ennahda Movement, so we face the danger that people do not have what's needed, the institutions, or a minimum level of awareness. You talked about the history of Tunisia and traditions in Tunisian society to reach consensual agreements and compromise, but Tunisia also succeeded in not personalising the solution. By this I mean that they did not look to one person or leader to bring about stability and power and win the confidence of the people so that the protestors could retire from the scene. As this did not happen in Tunisia, we believe there is a level of political awareness.

Salah al Jourshi

We, Tunisians beat ourselves up and are extremely self-critical-as do others in the Arab world. We are ready to accept an exceptional person. Let us start from the period of the Al-Husainiah state, which was in the recent past. At that time, the Tunisians bent to Turkish rule and then to colonialism. There were skirmishes here or there, but colonialism remained for more than 70 years prior to the authoritarian rule of Bourguiba. So, like the rest of the Arab people, Tunisia was ready to accept a powerful figure and even when the revolution erupted, there were political debates among the political elite, and criticism that there was no charismatic figure capable of uniting Tunisians during this period. But there was a possibility that such a person might bring a return to a reign of oppression. The fact that

everyone was equal at this stage forced Tunisians to accept pluralism as an end result, and to look for another formula to build their political future and community, away from the powerful single –man solution. Maybe this is one of our gains despite ourselves.

Then two dangerous things have occurred. First, the political elite has not so far met the aspirations of the Tunisian people. When you talk with Tunisians, they criticise all the politicians: Islamists, leftists...etc. Everyone is targeted and this is dangerous. Why? Because it may continue to grow- as a normal reaction by people following the major changes that we have had. There is currently talk that the conditions of Tunisians during the term of Ben Ali were better, even if the man was a thief and tyrant, but he ensured some kind of security and social stability and protection for the middle class.

Bassma Kodmani

There is this nostalgia for the past, even if it was a prison.

Salah al Jourshi

This is one of the dangers that face elite groups after a revolution. People feel nostalgic about their past if their present and future seem to be full of dangers and threats. But I think that there are necessary efforts to look for a solution that allows for the sound development of institutions and to compensate for the rule of an individual. Secondly, the way Tunisians are now acting in a way we call ‘crashing the barrier of fear’: rebelling against any state actions that try to impose measures of which they’re not convinced or that affect their interests. There is now a readiness to work collectively, to co-exist, because anyone who tries to dominate will be resisted by the others. This is an opportunity that we must invest in because if we fail, we will return to old dreams or spectres.

Salam Kawakibi

In discussions with the political and intellectual elite in Tunisia, there is talk about two contradictions or disagreements on the role of civil society in consensus. Some people argue that civil society must be granted a role in this process and we heard during several seminars that without civil society, a consensus would not have been reached. Others downplay the role of civil society and state that the real dialogue took place between the parties and was responsible for reaching consensus.

Salah al Jourshi

Civil society in Tunisia has become a reality of life.

Bassma Kodmani

Can you please define civil society in Tunisia and who do you include in this society?

Salah al Jourshi

When we talk about civil society in Tunisia, we mean the group of associations, factions and personalities, especially the trade

unions and their important role in social frameworks. There are also the cultural and social movements that started to emerge in an environment of freedom of expression. We find youth and women's groups and now the farmers have started to organise themselves. I mean, there is the emergence of new forces that are not necessarily homogenous. There are many contradictions that try to divide civil society. There are dangers that threaten the process of building a healthy civil society from parties who have a completely opposite understanding of civil society in its modern meaning. This new force, and we use the term "force" here because civil society played an important role when the parties were weak and fought each other, intervened to limit the ramifications of these disputes, or at least to direct them to a specific course of action.

I can point here to some of the roles of civil society in Tunisia after the revolution, when it contributed in a very significant way to defending its right to exist by drafting a very advanced law on associations that offers many possibilities. Civil society played a major role in preparing for the holding of elections that were important in the history of Tunisia. Through this process, some civil society leaders joined the executive authority and for three years now, are government leaders or in state institutions. Many of them were nurtured in civil society and managed associations and human rights organisations. They were behind the first commission that was established. If there had been a similar commission in Egypt, events would not have unfolded as they have. In order for the commission to protect the revolution and democratic transition, the head and members were from civil society. They are the people who placed the political debates in a framework and prevented any descent into chaos. More than this, the members of civil society took to the streets to protect neighbourhoods from looting and gangs and from those of the former regime who wanted to take revenge and reinstate Ben Ali.

They played a role in organising and monitoring the elections. For the first time in the Arab world, you have an independent commission to run the electoral process from start to finish, without any links to the Interior Ministry and takes no instructions from any government body. When you take a closer look at this commission, you discover that they are all activists from civil society. These are also the people who monitored the elections. Civil society was able to provide 8000 monitors for the elections within a short period of time. This was important because when you look at the political parties, you can see that

they are too weak to monitor the elections. Ennahda Movement with its widespread base was able to provide 16000 monitors; the second party was able to provide 800 monitors; plus other parties who provided 20 or 30 monitors. Civil society was able to create a formula to prevent any deviation or forgery, and this was possible through its assembly created to monitor the elections. Who sorted the ballots in a transparent manner and in the presence of members from civil society? Who preserved the rights of women so that they would not be lost? Who opposed terrorism in the discourse? A large sector of civil society participated in the constituent assembly elections. Who is monitoring this assembly very closely? Civil society in Tunisia has played this role despite upsets and funding problems and the absence of education and experience. Notwithstanding all the shortcomings and shortages, civil society in Tunisia has acted as basic safeguard so that the experience can proceed with the lowest level of upset.

Salam Kawakibi

There is a question about the impact of Egypt. We want to know if this was exaggerated or was it realistic because there is wide difference in the political structure, the role of civil society, and especially the role of the army in the two countries. Do you think that the concessions and consensus achieved is a direct result of the Egyptian effect?

Salah al Jourshi

Historically, there has been a competitive relationship between Tunisia and Egypt since the period of reform begun by Mohammed Abdo. Ideas and interests conflicted, making the two countries and regimes in a state of permanent competition. This is why when the revolution erupted in Tunisia, the Egyptians said: "If the peaceful Tunisian people who fear the regime were able to topple a dictator like Ben Ali, why don't we try also?" Many young activists made this statement on day one and there were exchanges of letters and experiences between Tunisian and Egyptian youths. There was dialectic interaction between them, and then the specific features of each country started to emerge. Even with this, there were strange similarities between the two countries. For example, there was the period of sit-ins and attacks against hospitals which happened both in Egypt and Tunisia. There was also the anarchy that occurred in both countries. We ran projects and field research that seemed to be from the same country. There was a major similarity when the Ennahda Movement rose in Tunisia as the main political force in the ruling system and the Muslim Brotherhood assumed power in Egypt. Talk started about a strategic alliance of the ruling systems. Difficulties started to appear when the Muslim

Brotherhood assumed rule in Egypt and similar difficulties were faced by the Ennahda Movement in Tunisia. Clashes took place with members of the media in Tunisia and in Egypt. When the Egyptians reached a stalemate, major demonstrations took place on June 30 and the army intervened. The first reactions came from the Gulf countries, and an important discussion was initiated and its minute details were studied and analyzed by the Ennahda Movement, which relied heavily for its national, regional and international role on the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. In addition, there were Islamists in power in Morocco. Talk began about a potential historical political alliance between the rising Islamic movements. Even when Syria was discussed, there was still a belief that the Islamists would eventually win the battle for the Islamic project. Subsequently, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt suffered a heavy blow and the majority of the Gulf countries decided to support the new regime despite everything. The American and European positions were unclear, with much maneuvering. They started with condemnation but slowly normalised relations with the new regime and then gave it their support.

Rashed Al-Ghannoushi realized that the Ennahda Movement could not continue with the same ambitions and its original ideals. In an important event that can be added to the internal developments we discussed earlier, Al-Ghannoushi called for the Ennahda Movement to leave power because if they continued to rule they would lose their base and the support of public opinion. Accordingly, they left power, also freeing themselves from regional and international proceedings. Al-Ghannoushi then made a tour abroad, stopping first in the United States where he told Washington that Ennahda is a different movement that had sacrificed its interests and power for democracy and internal peace in Tunisia, and that Ennahda would be a partner in the management of the next phase. This event changed things in a major way in Tunisia and must be taken into consideration during any future analysis of the country.

Bassma Kodmani

One final question, but it is really a practical question. In all the countries where revolutions took place, unprecedented security challenges arose due to regional conditions and other factors. Can we say that in Tunisia, the political track was protected in order to prevent the security forces from taking over? I am asking whether there is a government sector, in terms of ministries and security institutions, capable of working in a professional manner and dealing with security challenges

without any ideology or politicisation of the security apparatus. We faced this in other countries: like in Yemen where it is difficult to neutralise the security sector and deal with security issues without politicizing them and investing them in the partisan conflict. In Egypt, this was one of the major setbacks of the transitional phase, or in one period of the transitional phase. What is the relationship between security challenges and the transitional phase? Do you feel that Tunisia still faces even greater dangers in the future? Are there important decisions about the administration of the Interior Ministry or the police and so on? What factors exist at the present time for security without being affected by the political situation?

Salah al Jourshi

If you will allow me, I want to continue the point I was making earlier because it is linked to your question and it deals with the growing role of civil society in Tunisia. When the parties were opposed and the political elite was divided, civil society played two contradictory roles, but in a positive way. The first role was when a significant number of associations sided with the opposition, which withdrew from the constituent assembly council and began what was termed the “Bardo sit-in” or the departure sit-in. These associations sided with the opposition to create a new balance in the country. Activists from civil society did not realise it then, but they put pressure in that direction and achieved a balance. The 60 delegates who withdrew from the national council were not significant – 60 delegates do not make a difference – but when these 60 delegates were joined by a group of political parties and families, the situation changed a little, although the numbers remained limited. The balance changed and the message was targeted strongly towards the authorities when dozens of associations joined the sit-in and a march was organised. (I do not agree with the exaggerations about the figures and millions who gathered in the sit-in, whether in Egypt or Tunisia), but I will say that there was evidence that a significant portion of the Tunisian elite and society started to act and wanted to change the status quo. At that point, this was the message that made the ruling troika, especially the Ennahda Movement, alter its analysis of the political situation on the ground.

The other role of civil society, which went in the opposite direction, was when the so-called ‘quartet initiative’ was formed. The quartet comprised parties who had imposed themselves in previous years, including the Tunisian general labour union, which is considered to be the biggest in the country and has played important roles on several occasions.

The Tunisian General Labour Union historically saved the Constitutional Party from defeat by the French when Farhat Hashaad, the secretary general of the union, accepted to lead the political process when Bourguiba and the political leadership were in prison or abroad. This union with all its weight was joined by the League of Human Rights Organisations, the oldest in the Arab world and Africa, and attorneys from the national commission, who took to the streets during the worst events to defend the rights of political prisoners and the rights of political groups to exist and to self-expression; the attorneys are viewed as the party of protest that never tires. For the first time, there were common interests between two social adversaries: the labour union and the industry and trade union. Businessmen who were shunned during a certain historical period, especially after the revolution, were able to restore their reputation as partners in the protection of the homeland.

This quartet approached the political parties that were squabbling and told them: “Stop the fight now; we need to launch an initiative for national dialogue that results in a new landscape of balances and agreements”.

Civil society saved the country from the spectre of collapse. This effective symbolic and social power can counter attempts to endanger security by those who have tried and are still trying; these are small groups that saw the collapse of the dictatorship as an opportunity to Islamise society and impose Islamisation by force if necessary. This is why acts of violence started here and there and weapons started coming from Libya to Tunisia. We hope that Libya can emerge from its dark tunnel as soon as possible and can start to rebuild the lost state. We hope this because Libya has become a daily source of threats to Tunisian strategic security. Many Tunisians fear that these young people will blow up the country and will perform acts like in other countries, including Syria. Political discussions considered how to deal with this phenomenon, especially as the country was ruled by an Islamist faction, the Ennahda Movement. Although it is claimed that it is not part of the jihadist Salafist movement, the person who claims this does not understand the reality or wants to impose facts. The Ennahda Movement was mistaken when it imagined that it could place all the Islamic factions in one framework under its leadership and try to make them part of the means of controlling the situation in the country. It did not engage in active conflict with these Islamist movements about visions, concepts and projects, to the extent that the opposition forces thought that this was part of a game by the Ennahda

Movement. When the Ennahda Movement acted weakly, these Islamist factions were able to expand and made every effort to delegitimize the Ennahda Movement and accuse it of betraying the Islamic project by giving up the issues such as sharia law. These factions started to consider themselves as a real alternative movement with their vision of Islam in Tunisia.

Ennahda did not learn its lesson until it started to confront the young men from jihadist Salafist movements who were trained and highly armed, and only when threats were made against the Interior Minister, Ali Al-Areed, afterw he assumed this post before becoming Prime Minister. Threats were made against him, and young men protested in front of the Interior Ministry to accuse him of treason and of retreating from Islam (Riddah). They threatened to teach him a lesson. At this point, the confrontations started between these two sides. What was interesting is that the Ennahda Movement engaged in gradual and escalating confrontation with the jihadist wing. This weakened the Ennahda Movement, but gave it space and prompted all political forces to support the Ennahda Movement and acknowledge the need to oppose the jihadist movements. The moment that was the most dangerous was when Chokri Belaid was assassinated. His assassination left a hole in the hearts of Tunisians, but was also an opportunity to inspire a state of emotional and political sympathy. Tunisians discovered the dangers and historical roots to act against violence and civil war. Tunisians engaged in a process of solidarity against this danger. In the past, relations between Tunisians and the security forces were tense, but we now see how, for the first time, Tunisian citizens from various sectors took flowers to security stations and embraced employees. They all fought together in the same battle. At this point, the terrorist project collapsed and there are still no grounds to harbour them in Tunisia, whether in border areas or anywhere else. These movements started life as secret groups living under cover and performing operations here or there, but they could not find people to stand or support them in this project; they found a people who hated such policies and options.

Bassma Kodmani

The failure of the experience in Egypt had a positive impact on you. We hope that the positive experience in Tunisia will in turn influence the situation in Egypt.

Salah al Jourshi

We hope so because what is happening in Egypt will not save the Egyptian revolution and may create an extremely complicated situation for the ruler, the population and for the region. I hope that the Tunisian experience will achieve greater

experience and wisdom to face all financial, economic and security problems so that Egypt, and others, can benefit too.

Bassma Kodmani

Salah Eddin Al Jourshi, thank you very much.

About ARI

The Arab Reform Initiative is the leading Arab think tank founded on the principles of impartiality, social justice and diversity. Our mission is to promote an agenda for democratic change through policy analysis and research, while providing a platform for inspirational voices.

- We partner with institutes on original research, analysis and outreach - across the all Arab countries and around the world.
- We empower individuals and institutions to develop their own policy solutions.
- We mobilise stakeholders to build coalitions for change.
- Our goal is to see vibrant democratic societies emerge in all Arab countries.

www.arab-reform.net

About ARI Dialogues

ARI Dialogues provide the opportunity for leading figures, active members in their societies, to discuss their democratic visions, the core challenges, and potential routes for political change towards democracy in times of transition .

The Arab Reform Initiative does not take institutional positions on public policy issues; the views represented herein are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Initiative, its staff or its board. Copyright of this publication is held by the Arab Reform Initiative. You may not copy, reproduce, republish or circulate in any way the content from this publication except for your own personal and non-commercial use. Any other use requires the prior written permission of the Arab Reform Initiative.

©Arab Reform Initiative January 2015

contact@arab-reform.net